

## **Diversity Statement**

### **Christina F. Kolas, B.A., M.A.**

I am a second-generation Greek-American woman from a working-class family. Growing up, my father worked three part-time blue-collar jobs to make sure his three daughters had access to the higher education he missed. My personal and professional experiences have equipped me with the ability to implement programs and events in collegiate settings, teach literacy and literature in ways that decolonialize the canon, build community, and, overall, how to advocate for underrepresented groups through the transformative powers of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in academia and borders beyond. As a Greek-American female educator, I myself embody an underrepresented category in academia. I continuously think about how I can confront and challenge white-centered education with a transdisciplinarity that is collaborative, connective, multi-ontological, boundary crossing, and devoted to combatting wicked problems.

My current and past appointments with undergraduate students shows the importance of inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy. As an Instructional Student Assistant Tutor for CSU Fullerton, I gained practical knowledge in equitable and accessible tutoring methodologies by working as an embedded tutor in an English Language Learners (ELL) preparatory course, as well as working with students from Disability Support Services (DSS). As a Graduate Embedded Tutor (G.E.T) for Glendale Community College, I was a classroom-based tutor for English 101+: Intro to College Reading & Composition. I provided just-in-time support through tutoring and mentorship serving disproportionately impacted students as part of the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative. I conducted weekly tutor office hours (with in-person, online, and asynchronous accommodations), where I engaged students in collaborative conversations discussing writing, critical thinking, researching, and proofreading. Similarly, I currently work as an Apprentice English PAL at Chaffey College in their Peer Assistants for Learning program. I am assigned to two online sections of English 1A: Composition. I am embedded as a near-peer mentor reinforcing course content, offering support during the writing process, and helping students navigate campus resources. In addition to hosting one-on-one tutoring online and in-person at the Chaffey Chino Success Center, I host weekly group sessions as they foster a sense of community, which has been shown to improve student success. This chance to connect, participate, and ask questions in real time has proven to be valuable.

Not only do I have experience with undergrads, but also graduate students. My time as a Graduate Writing Consultant for CSU Fullerton's Academic Affairs allowed me to work with the Writing Across the Curriculum program to assist grad students with writing and research for their theses in collaboration with librarians. As the 2021-2022 Vice President of the Graduate Student Council (GSC) at Claremont Graduate University (CGU), I defended the welfare of a higher educational student body by embedding DEIB into the fabric of our organization. I championed for and partaken in policy passion projects that represent all, not just the few. As a Constitutional Consultant for CGU's GSC, I pledged to ratify the literature and rhetoric of the student constitution to be non-hierarchical and grounded in DEIB. I served on committees for Student Affairs, Student Grievances, Student Elections, Academic Integrity, Post-Coursework Success, and Student Commencement that create visionary platforms for engaging in national dialogue at the institutional level. As a Peer Mentor for CGU's Ignite Mentorship Program, I aid in supporting the transition of first-year students of historically marginalized communities into grad school. I earned a College Teaching Certificate with CGU's Preparing Future Faculty program to continue my training and self-awareness regarding ethical pedagogy and equity-

minded positioning. An integral part of being a faculty member expands beyond the scope of the classroom walls, but by actively fostering inclusion and equity in external areas of life.

As an early modernist, I am a member of the Shakespeare Association of America, the Renaissance Society of America, the Society for Renaissance Studies (SRS), the Milton Society of America, and the Renaissance Conference of Southern California (RCSC) to keep abreast of the types of DEIB conversations existent in my field. I intern for the RCSC, where I create content to promote their professional conference and events dedicated to the collective advancement of learning in Renaissance Studies. I have presented at regional conferences like BritGrad, the RCSC, the SRS, the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, and the Newberry Library's Multidisciplinary Graduate Conference in Premodern Studies.

Similar to how I approach learning facilitation, I approach my research of Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser, and Marlowe with intersectionality. By taking a feminine psychological approach, I aim to combat the methodological blindness in my field by introducing new ways of viewing archaic and white male-centered canonical literature. Shakespeare's works illicit themes about race, gender, and power structures that continuously lurk through our nation today. His plots, nuanced subject matter, and characterization shed light on the present condition. They can serve as a guide to understanding the havoc that wrong beliefs, assumptions, and oppression can cause a society. Thus, I juxtapose early modern works with diverse scholarship. When teaching *Paradise Lost*, I assign Daniel Shore's "Was Milton White?"<sup>1</sup> to probe at how the early modern canon links to 21<sup>st</sup> century discussions of white supremacy, racism, and privilege. I also aim to teach the few female authors of the period by assigning selections from Aemilia Lanyer's poetry volume *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* in conjunction with Patricia Demers' "Early Modern Women's Words With Power: Absence and Presence."<sup>2</sup> Such readings prompt discussions about a lack of female and person of color authorship in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

I am committed to my allyship and to fostering an inclusive academic environment where sexual, gender, dis/abled, and racially minoritized communities feel they belong. To me, these feelings of belonging begin with a syllabus. By moving away from compliance thinking and the competition-based dominance model of instruction, I invite students to share authority in the classroom by focusing on knowledge creation and meaningful application. My experience as a Canvas Course Builder for CGU allowed me to think more about my teaching and course design strategies to fit Universal Design for Learning. My curriculum is equitably designed for those in the margins. Rather than treating students as mere vessels, I create a student-focused presence by having flexible and workable deadlines, offering students multiple ways to participate synchronously or asynchronously, adopting low stakes grading to emphasize long-term improvement over knowledge capture, and most importantly, giving students agency over their paper topics to further my commitment to their own self-discovery.

By working with such a diverse student and faculty population over the last nine years, I have learned that everyone has a story that is uniquely their own. My work and teaching are centered on understanding the microaggressive history of our nation as one of isolation and in turn, striving to dismantle such divisive narratives by making the classroom a place of reciprocity; a place of reciprocal listening, healing, loving, and honoring where every individual feels a sense of belonging. As a Greek-American woman finding and fighting her way in academia, "I belong here,"<sup>3</sup> and I wholeheartedly want my students to feel the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Shore, Daniel. "Was Milton White?" *Milton Studies*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2020, pp. 252-65.

<sup>2</sup> Demers, Patricia. "Early Modern Women's Words With Power: Absence and Presence." *Semeia*, vol. 89, no. 89, 2002, pp. 89-102.

<sup>3</sup> hooks, bell. *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. Routledge, 2009.